

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCCT-01 SY-04 OPR-01 IO-10 A-01 AID-05

SAM-01 SR-02 ORM-01 OC-05 CCO-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00

CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /085 W
----- 079580

R 271622Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3103

DIA WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR

USINT BAGHDAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2682

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS LE

SUBJECT: SECURITY SITUATION IN LEBANON FOLLOWING SIDON CLASHES

REF: BEIRUT 2611

1. SIDON REMAINED ISOLATED FROM REST OF LEBANON FEB 27, AS
GOL-- IN RETURN FOR WHAT WE UNDERSTAND (BUT CANNOT CONFIRM)
WERE PLO ASSURANCES THAT IT WOULD ACT TO RESTORE PUBLIC ORDER IN
TOWN AND BRING UNDER CONTROL "ARMED ELEMENTS" WHO WERE INVOLVED
IN YESTERDAY'S SHOOTING INCIDENTS--WITHDREW LEBANESE ARMY UNITS
TO TOWN'S OUTSKIRTS. THROUGHOUT DAY, TRAVELLERS ON MAIN COASTAL
ROAD WERE BEING DETOURED AROUND SIDON AND CENTER OF TOWN WAS
REPORTEDLY THROGGED BY HEAVILY ARMED MEN (INCLUDING MANY FEDAYEEN)

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WHO APPARENTLY WERE MOVING ABOUT UNMOLESTED. SPORADIC FIRING

(PROBABLY IN AIR) COULD BE HEARD, BURNING TIRES WERE MUCH IN EVIDENCE, AND SHOPS AND BUSINESSES WERE COMPLETELY CLOSED.

2. PRIMIN SOLH, FACED WITH OUTRAGED REACTION FROM LEFTIST GROUPS AND MEDIA CHARGING GOL WITH "PREMEDIATED ATTEMPT" TO "MURDER" MAAROUF SAAD AND DEMANDING THAT GOVERNOR OF SOUTH LEBANON AND SIDON ARMY COMMANDER BOTH BE SACKED, HAS PUBLICLY DECLARED THAT FEDAYEEN WERE NOT INVOLVED IN ANY WAY IN YESTERDAY'S SHOOTING.

(COMMENT: REPORT CONTAINED PARA 1 ABOVE, COMBINED WITH REPORTS THAT SOLH SPENT MOST OF LAST NIGHT REASONING WITH PLO LEADERS AND VARIOUS LEFTIST FIGURES, WOULD APPEAR TO BELIE THIS CLAIM.) SOCIALIST LEADER KAMAL JUMBLATT, WHO CURRENTLY IS ALLIED TO SOLH GOVT AND PRES FRANGIE, HAS ALSO BEEN WORKING HARD TO CALM HIS LEFTIST ASSOCIATES AND ACT AS GO-BETWEEN WITH FEDAYEEN. (COMMENT: JUMBLATT FINDS HIMSELF IN SOMEWHAT TICKLISH POSITION, SYMPATHIZING AS HE DOES WITH LEFTIST-FDAYEEN POSITIONS BUT BEING OBLIGED-- OUT OF LOYALTY TO FRANGIE--TO DEFEND ARMY'S FEB 26 INTERVENTION AND SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS IN SIDON.) NEVERTHELESS, RUMORS (APPARENTLY FALSE) OF SAAD'S DEATH IN HOSPITAL HAVE KEPT LEFTIST EMOTIONS AT HIGH PITCH AND PROVOKED ANGRY DEMONSTRATIONS BY SMALL GROUPS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BEIRUT TODAY. COUNTRY-WIDE GENERAL STRIKE IS BEING CALLED FOR BY LEFTIST GROUPS ON FEB 28, AND MASS PROTEST DEMONSTRATION IS BEING PLANNED IN BEIRUT FOR SAME DAY. (COMMENT: IF SAAD SHOULD ACTUALLY DIE, THESE MANIFESTATIONS COULD ASSUME SERIOUS PROPORTIONS. WE ARE TAKING NECESSARY PRECAUTIONS TO COUNSEL PRUDENCE AND ALERTNESS ON PART OF EMBASSY PERSONNEL.)

3. IN SHORT-TERM, WITHDRAWAL OF LEBANESE ARMY UNITS FROM SIDON SHOULD HAVE CALMING EFFECT, ASSUMING THAT PLO LIVES UP TO ITS ALLEGED PROMISE TO BRING "ARMED ELEMENTS" UNDER ITS CONTROL. EVEN IF THIS SHOULD HAPPEN, HOWEVER, GOL MAY EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTY IN FULLY REASSERTING ITS AUTHORITY OVER SIDON. WHATEVER HAPPENS, EVENTS OF FEB 26-27 HAVE ONCE AGAIN HIGHLIGHTED DIFFICULT SECURITY PROBLEM (PRIMARILY, BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY VIS-A-VIS FEDAYEEN) WHICH EXISTS FOR GOL NOT ONLY IN SIDON BUT ALSO IN OTHER PARTS OF LEBANON, WHERE GIVEN LIMITED FORCES AT ITS DISPOSAL GOL-- IN ORDER TO PRESERVE MINIMAL DEGREE OF PEACE AND QUIET--IS OFTEN OBLIGED TO NEGOTIATE AND EVEN COMPROMISE WITH THOSE ELEMENTS WHO DISTURBED PUBLIC ORDER IN FIRST PLACE.

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